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REPORTS, STUDIES AND OTHER DOCUMENTATION FOR THE PREPARATORY COMMITTEE AND THE WORLD CONFERENCE

Contribution*/ submitted by the Association of Refugees and Displaced Persons of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina

The Secretary-General has received the following contribution which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[28 March 2000]

*/ This contribution is issued, unedited, as received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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More than four years after the Dayton Peace Agreement about 870 000 refugees and displaced persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to live away from their homes because they are on the territory of the other entity. Of these, 533 000 live in the Bosniak-Croat Federation and 340 000 in Republika Srpska. With regard to minority returns, only 13 000 persons returned to Republika Srpska, 65 000 to the Federation and 30 000 to Canton Sarajevo in 1999.

The main reasons for this stagnating and even deteriorating situation are:

1. The nationalist parties still rule in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is in their interest to obstruct minority returns of refugees since these would jeopardize their power.

2. The authorities lack the will to solve political and social problems and to speed up the process of democratization. Their major concern seems to be their own prosperity. For the politicians in such a country refugees and displaced persons are only the object of manipulation.

3. The local NGOs are barely tolerated by the authorities of both entities. The latter attack and oppose every organization or civil movement aiming at progress and democracy.

4. Property laws in both entities have been amended. Unfortunately, the process of privatization for many seems to be an opportunity to usurp the property of refugees and displaced persons.

5. The human rights laws in both entities very often do not comply with European human rights conventions. The result is discrimination of refugees and displaced persons in their own country.

6. The education system is divided along ethnic lines. But joint education programms are one of the pre-conditions for sustainable return.

7. Among the most severe problems and obstacles to return are joblessness, general poverty, lack of welfare work and, very often, of basic health care.

8. Nevertheless, minority returns have continued across the country. Unfortunately, the returnees very often cannot settle down because they have no means for their house repair. At the moment there are 13 500 returnee families in Republika Srpska who are living in tents and even worse makeshift accomodations; the number of such families in the Federation amounts to 9 000.

9. Refugees and displaced persons have failed to establish joint or coordinated return programmes or strategy. Their state of mind can best be described as lethargic and tormented.